

THE MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION SYSTEM



The Secondary Essays Playbook

A prompt-to-proof system for writing faster, tailoring honestly, and showing why you belong at each school.

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Research tools, story-bank worksheets, prompt frameworks, revision rubrics, and a seven-day prewriting plan for U.S. medical school applicants.

**2027 APPLICATION CYCLE
FIRST EDITION**

Build reusable evidence, not reusable answers

A secondary is a school-specific argument built from facts you already own. Prepare your raw material once; reshape it every time the prompt, mission, or emphasis changes.

The promise

By the end, you will have a story bank, fit matrix, response library, tracking system, revision rubric, and submission checklist.

The boundary

No formula guarantees admission. Prompts, limits, deadlines, and authorship policies vary; each school's current instructions control.

Use the sequence

1 Decode	2 Choose proof	3 Tailor	4 Revise	5 Submit
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1. **Draft in a master document.** Keep each prompt, limit, source link, draft, and status together.
2. **Answer the exact question first.** Do not force a favorite story into a prompt it cannot answer.
3. **Show behavior before traits.** A bounded example carries more weight than calling yourself resilient, compassionate, or collaborative.
4. **Research before naming fit.** Use official school sources and distinguish features you verified from impressions.
5. **Protect your voice.** Feedback should sharpen your reasoning, not replace your authorship.

The central rule: reuse experiences when they genuinely fit; never submit an unchanged essay merely because two prompts look similar.

Secondaries convert a broad candidacy into a local case

Your primary application introduces you to every school. A secondary asks whether your experiences, attributes, and goals make sense in this particular institution.

The reader may be testing

- Mission alignment and school-specific interest.
- Judgment under challenge, uncertainty, or conflict.
- Likely contribution to classmates and communities.
- Readiness, growth, and consistency with the primary.
- Communication under a strict character limit.

The essay should add

- A new angle on known experience.
- A missing example or context.
- A concrete bridge from past action to future participation.
- An honest explanation of change.
- A response that could not be sent unchanged everywhere.

The useful test

After reading the answer, can the reviewer name the question you answered, the evidence you used, what it shows, and why it matters at that school?

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) describes holistic review as balancing experiences, attributes, and metrics in light of an institution's mission. That is why a strong secondary does more than repeat qualifications: it makes the fit legible.

This secondary should help the reader understand:

Framework source: AAMC holistic review and application-component guidance. See Sources.

A queue prevents urgency from flattening your writing

Secondaries often arrive in clusters. Treat them as a portfolio of small projects, not an inbox emergency.

Capture Prompt + limit	Classify Family + risk	Research Verified fit	Draft Proof + meaning	QA School + portal
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Priority signal	Do first	Why
Explicit deadline	Calendar immediately	School rule controls
High-fit school	Research early	Tailoring takes time
Short prompts	Batch by family	Fast wins, careful limits
Complex explanation	Draft before fatigued	Judgment needs attention
Low-confidence answer	Seek targeted feedback	Fix substance, not polish

Use statuses that describe the next action

Queued Prompt captured; instructions not yet verified.	Drafting Research and evidence selected; answer in progress.	Ready Content, fit, voice, limit, and portal preview checked.
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Do not universalize the "two-week rule." Some schools set explicit turnaround requirements; many do not. Prioritize published deadlines and write promptly with care.

Timing guidance: Dartmouth Health Professions Program. See Sources.

Decode the verb before choosing the story

Similar topics can demand different work. "Describe," "reflect," "explain," and "contribute" are not interchangeable.

Prompt family	Hidden task	Proof to select
Why us / fit	Make a two-way match	Past pattern + verified feature
Background / contribution	Show perspective in action	Lived experience + behavior
Challenge / adversity	Reveal response and adaptation	Constraint + choices + growth
Failure / feedback	Demonstrate accountability	Error + repair + changed practice
Leadership / teamwork	Show role judgment	Shared goal + specific contribution
Conflict	Show listening and resolution	Difference + dialogue + outcome
Service / community	Define service through need	Relationship + sustained action
Gap year / current work	Explain purposeful development	Activities + learning + continuity
Academic concern	Provide context and evidence	Facts + ownership + trend
Reapplicant	Prove meaningful change	Diagnosis + action + result
Career vision	Show informed direction	Exposure + questions + openness
Optional / anything else	Add decision-relevant context	Only genuinely new information

Rewrite the prompt in plain English: "The committee wants evidence that I can..."

Answer every clause. If a prompt asks what happened, what you learned, and how you will contribute, budget space for all three.

FREE PREVIEW · WHAT'S INSIDE THE FULL GUIDE

The Secondary Essays Playbook

You've read the opening pages. Here is everything else the guide covers:

- The operating system and prompt taxonomy
- Story bank and competency map
- School research and the fit matrix
- Archetype chapters: why this school, background, challenge
- Failure and feedback, service and community
- Leadership, teamwork, and conflict
- Gap year, academic concern, reapplicant, career vision
- Optional and additional-information essays
- Response architecture and compression
- Reuse and tailoring without sounding generic
- Tracking dashboard across schools
- AI and authorship boundaries
- Revision rubric, final check, seven-day prewriting plan

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